

“BEST PRACTICES” FOR NWS ALASKA REGION WEB PAGES

Revised: May 20, 2002

Use the following interim guidance to help ensure proper web page content for all NWS office web sites in the Alaska Region. This document contains a summary of “Best Practices” and links to relevant Government policies. We want to acknowledge and thank the Western Region for developing the majority of this guidance.

This document is presented in an outline format with action items at the end of each major section to help each office to quickly review and implement the “Best Practices” for all web pages.

Because we expect this guidance will continue to change based on legal precedents and political interests, we will post the latest version on the Alaska region intranet page. The document will have a revision date to help the user determine the latest version. Because of the expected on going changes, all sites will need to keep up with evolving rules.

Sites can deviate from these “Best Practices” upon receiving Regional approval.

RELEVANT POLICIES

The following URL links provide information needed to properly monitor and approve web sites.

Department of Commerce

- a. Web Masters Group: <http://www.doc.gov/webresources>
- b. Guidelines for Section 508: <http://www.section508.gov/>
- c. DOC Internet Policy: <http://www.masc.noaa.gov/masc/sd/docinet2.html>
- d. Guidelines for Section 515:
<http://www.osec.doc.gov/cio/oipr/OS-non-sfs-std-04-30.html>

NOAA

- a. Use of Internet: <http://www.rdc.noaa.gov/%7Enao/212-14.html>
- b. Internet Services Management: <http://www.ofa.noaa.gov/~irm/>
- c. NOAA Privacy Act: <http://www.rdc.noaa.gov/~foia/asdhome/privacy-rev.htm>

NWS

- a. NWS CIO: <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/cio/htm/policy.htm>
- b. NWS Policy Directives: <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/directives/>

ACTION: Review information at these sites and follow guidance supplied.

SITE STANDARDS

Government web sites have high standards and must show:

- a. Impartiality – simply stated “our sites cannot show or imply favoritism.”
- b. Professionalism – all NWS web pages are part of official collective of dissemination services. This means we must maintain the same standards as other dissemination systems.
- c. Any NWS web page must present only information that is relevant to the mission of the NWS.

ACTION: MIC/HIC has final responsibility for content and must monitor/approve web pages.

PROFESSIONAL PUBLIC PAGES

All NWS web pages must maintain professional quality. This means:

- a. No jokes, reference to sport teams, or inappropriate images.
- b. No products tailored to a specific user or event, like a baseball game or other public event.
- c. Labeling of services must be consistent with Policy Directives (ie former OMLs/ROMLs).
- d. Labels must be consistent with current NWS services.

Examples:

No forecast labeled as an agricultural forecast – but generic freeze warning and advisories are okay.

No forecast labeled as a ski-resort or ski-area forecast, but avalanche forecast are okay.

- e. All NWS web pages must use the “Corporate Image” banner and, where appropriate, the standard left-hand menu selection. Interim guidance for this was presented at the Alaska Region webmaster seminars and via E-mail messages. Contact ARH for questions concerning implementation of the “Corporate Image.”

ACTION: Review all web pages and make sure labels, data and forecasts are consistent with policy directives.

JUMP PAGES

Use “jump pages” when linking to other non-NOAA sites.

- a. When jumping to any non-NOAA web address or site, a NWS jump page must be displayed and the link should be to the external sites' welcome page.
Example: link to AMS/NWA welcome page
- b. An NWS jump page must be used for any page that is NOT hosted on an NOAA server with an NOAA server address.
- c. Use the proper NWS jump page.

ACTION: Review all web pages and put “jump pages” on all links to non-NOAA pages.

LINKS

Use links to other sites on NWS Web pages carefully. The Government cannot appear to favor or recommend one site over another. Remember, the public will interpret a link as an implied endorsement.

A short description of each link on every web page is required. Example: “More mesonet observations are available from the University of Utah.” Information on the link must be relevant to mission of NWS. When in doubt, ask Alaska Region Headquarters first.

Non-NWS data sets

- a. Other Federal, State and Local government sites are generally okay – but check to make sure web site does not have endorsements and/or advertising.
- b. Be careful with all other data sites – policy becoming more conservative. Ask yourself – Is it really necessary for our public page?
- c. If NWS forecasters want to put data on an internal page:
 - (1) We are not in the business of providing a long list of weather links. Try to limit to NWS services and data.
 - (2) Does the NWS have a source of the data? If yes, use that.
 - (3) Are we linking to a commercial site? If yes, DON'T DO IT!!!

ACTION: Review all web pages and remove all links unless it meets the tests listed above.

Links to .com

Links to .com must have a jump page. Discourage all links to .com with the following exceptions:

- a. Camera data
 - (1) Use if NO advertising of private company exists on image.
- b. Other Government sites
 - (1) Use if Federal, State or Local Government is hosted on a .com site.
- c. All links to .com must have a “jump page”. A short description of link on web page is required. Example: “More mesonet observations are from City of Sacramento.”

ACTION: Review all web pages and remove all .com links that do not meet the tests listed above.

Links to .edu and .org

Discourage using most links to .edu and .org

- a. Links pages must present information relevant to the mission of the NWS.
- b. Use .edu and .org links for limited cases such as:
 - (1) Official Projects
 - (2) A legal agreement is in place for a specific project – such as a Memorandum of Agreement or University Cooperative Agreement.
- c. Data Projects
 - (1) If project is part of an organized user group to collect observational data – such as Alert User Group or Spotter Group
 - (2) If a project is directly relevant to NWS Mission Data Links
 - (i.) Example: Drought Monitor Map and Snotel data
- d. Professional Organization
 - (1) Link to AMS, NWA okay – but must be relevant to mission of NWS

Restrictions for .edu and .org links

- a. Do not link to any .edu or .org page that has:
 - (1) advertising of private company.
 - (2) lobbying or some other political/endorsement activity exist on page.
- b. Do NOT link to a site that has nothing to do directly with NWS Service Products. Here are examples of improper sites:
 - (1) Link to Chamber of Commerce
 - (2) Link to Marine/River/Boating/Flying Organizations

ACTION: Review all web pages and remove .edu and .org links that do not meet the tests listed above.

Links to other sites

- a. Each page must have a link to NWS and NOAA
 - (1) These links are part of the corporate page – logos on top.
- b. Links to private sector and Universities
 - (1) The following links contain a list of links supported and approved by NWSHQ
 - Link to private sector: <http://205.156.54.206/im/more>
 - Link to Universities: <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/community>

ACTION: Review all web pages and ensure they have proper links.

Webmaster Link

- a. Each site must have a webmaster link on homepage page.
- b. Link to generic email address okay.

ACTION: Review each homepage page and make it has a webmaster link.

Privacy Notice & Disclaimer

- a. Each site must have a privacy link and disclaimer.
- b. Each webmaster and MIC/HIC should read and understand the information. provided at the following URL's:
 - (1) Privacy and Security Notice Link: <http://www.noaa.gov/privacy.html>
 - (2) Disclaimer: <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/disclaimer.html>

ACTION: Place privacy link and disclaimer on homepage. Privacy link must also be placed any page that requires user data.

Copyright

- a. Do NOT “cut and paste” text or graphics that we have not created or have permission to use.
- b. Same rules that are used for any intellectual rights – i.e. books, papers.

ACTION: Review all web pages and remove information that does not pass the tests listed above.

Licenses

- a. We must have licenses or permission to use any software not developed by NWS or is free shareware.
 - (1) Beware of using code developed by any company unless freely available on open source.
 - (2) Do not make any deal to get free use of any software by endorsing the product.
 - (3) Contact ARH if you receive any offers for free use of software or services.

ACTION: Do NOT use unlicensed software.

COLLECTING INFORMATION

- a. Do not collect information about users beyond normal security/usage statistics
 - (1) Be very careful with spotter pages – can ONLY collect weather information – type of weather, location, etc.
 - (2) Do NOT collect information about user – name/address unless page meets privacy policy.
- b. NOAA Privacy Act: <http://www.rdc.noaa.gov/~foia/asdhome/privacy-rev.htm>

ACTION: Review and remove pages that violate policy.

Use of Persistent Cookies

- a. Use of persistent cookies is against policy:
http://www.doc.gov/webresources/Policy7b_CookiesPolicy.html

ACTION: Remove any page that uses persistent cookies

Surveys and collecting user feedback

- a. User surveys are prohibited unless you receive prior approval from ARH.

ACTION: Remove customer surveys unless you have permission.

INTERNAL VERSUS PUBLIC PAGES

- a. Public pages must follow all guidelines and be accessible by all members the Public.
- b. Internal Page must be accessible only by NWS/NOAA office
 - (1) Use only for office functions.
 - (2) Recent rulings by NOAA are leading to the application of policies to internal pages.
 - (3) Must actively restrict access by public, including web crawler and probes.

ACTION: Restrict access to internal pages by using password system or by restricting access by IP address and network routing.

508 USER ACCESSIBILITY

- a. 508 standards are now applied to all new web pages and pages that are substantially altered.

<http://www.cast.org/Bobby/>

ACTION: Use Bobby Level I to check each page for all 508 issues. This will ensure basic 508 compliance.

515 DATA INTEGRITY

- a. Data on Web sites must be of high quality and consistent with other NWS issued products. Policy is being drafted.

ACTION: Review data sets supplied on all pages and ensure they originate from official NWS data only.

PUBLIC INTERACTION

- a. Limit public interaction through the web site.
 - (2) Carefully limit direct public contact to NWS services.
 - (i) Labels must reflect this. Examples:
 - Not Acceptable: "Ask an hydrologist"
 - Acceptable: "Ask about NWS Hydrologic Services"

ACTION: Review all web pages and ensure public interaction is limited to NWS services only.

NEW SERVICE PRODUCTS

All new or experimental service products must have ARH clearance BEFORE being placed on public web page.

- a. Final policy to be released on NWS Policy Directive Page
<http://www.nws.noaa.gov/directives/>

ACTION: Review all web pages and ensure that pages and graphics are labeled correctly.

WEB HOSTING

- a. The NWS cannot host any other organizations web pages unless there is a formal written agreement prior to hosting.
 - (1) No hosting of AMS/NWA pages. Links to AMS/NWA with proper jump page when pages are hosted on other servers are okay.
 - (2) Remove Union pages by May 31, 2002.

ACTION: Remove any web page or site that is not NWS.

LEGAL RULINGS AND POLICY

Legal rulings and policies tending toward more conservative approach

- a. True for government as well as private sector.
- b. Government sites held to a higher standard.
- c. Agencies held responsible for content.
- d. Web sites do represent NWS.
- e. Must be consistent with NWS Policy Directives and existing Services.
- f. Web pages must present information that is relevant to the mission of the NWS.
- g. Keep all web pages professional.